

STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

April 21, 1977

Dr. Donald Fredrickson
Director, NIH
Bethesda, MD 20014

Dear Don,

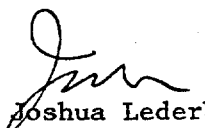
Thank you for sending me the copies of the "From the NIH" sections. I found them extraordinarily interesting and I hope that as these are accumulated they may be useful in such contexts as presentations to Congress. Unfortunately they arrived just too late for me to be able to use them directly in some remarks that I had prepared myself for Congressman Flood's subcommittee.

I am however, enclosing a copy of the latter with the hope of enrolling your own attention to some of the institutional issues that I mentioned there. I know of your own deep interest in the problem of "technology transfer." Both of us read the work that Comroe and Dripps did for the panel on biomedical research. That was a groundbreaking effort, but I'm sure that we would all agree that it is just scratching the surface of an inquiry into how discovery really takes place and the social engineering that might best serve public needs.

But this is a self-exemplifying instance of the institutional problem that I mentioned earlier. It is very difficult for me to see any direct mechanism whereby a person like myself can engage in that kind of interdisciplinary exploration and still satisfy my peers when it comes to the review of research projects. That is not an empty anxiety: there is a case just pending about which I have great trepidations. But it would not be appropriate for me to bring you into the concrete details while it is in the mill awaiting council action. I will let you know about it later, hopefully in a mood of less than total despair.

I was quite serious in indicating my own interest in the examination of the process of discovery and sometime I hope to have the occasion to share a little more with you about some of the tacks we have taken in that direction.

Sincerely yours


Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

APR 22 1977

decided on a DEFERRAL action for your above referenced renewal grant application in order to secure additional information. The Study Section found difficulty in formulating a more definitive recommendation because of the manner in which the material within the body of your application was presented. Your specific aims have broadly stated in essence that your objectives are to study bacterial transformation. The research plan and protocols which you have presented to attain your objective(s) are similar, if I may use the analogy, to the outlines brushed in by an artist of international reputation. Unfortunately, the Study Section cannot view such a presentation and in good faith fulfill its responsibility of public accountability for its judgments. What we need now are the finer brushstrokes that will paint in the details you have in mind so that others may find themselves better able to evaluate the finalized picture.

Though the objective of studying transformation may be worthy, your overall proposal does not suggest specific models, does not suggest specific mechanisms for investigation, and does not describe specific experiments that might generate specific models for recombination. The other components of your proposal raise questions of a similar nature; exactly what and how are things to be pursued? I might add that the Study Section is not interested in re-

*This is what I am up
against. I was told that
"track record" was no
longer a consideration.*

*I replied that my forte
was discovery, not
cultivating predictable
tracks; and I am
keeping my fingers crossed*

Jmh.

